

RHODE ISLAND GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE BOARD

WORK-BASED LEARNING | EXTERNAL REVIEW

Providing All Students Access to High-Quality Experiences



Education Strategy Group

ACHIEVING GREATER IMPACT

NOVEMBER 2017

Introduction

Rhode Island has set an ambitious credential attainment goal: By 2025, at least 70 percent of Rhode Islanders will hold an associate or bachelor's degree with value to the state and regional economy. The state's Theory of Action is clear; the route to economic and career success for Rhode Islanders is through jobs in priority industries that require technical skills and a high-value postsecondary credential. Rigorous, industry-aligned work-based learning (WBL) experiences beginning in high school are an essential addend of this equation:



Given the important role of work-based learning in fulfilling the state's economic vision, the Rhode Island Governor's Workforce Board (GWB) contracted with Education Strategy Group (ESG) to analyze the state's current credential attainment efforts and develop a plan to help the state reach its attainment goal. As part of that work, ESG was asked to rigorously assess Rhode Island's current K-12 work-based learning efforts to determine areas in need of improvement and strategies to bring about that improvement so that **all** high school students have access to a high-quality experience before graduation on their road to earning a postsecondary credential of value.

ESG undertook the multi-step process that is described below and further explained throughout this report to ultimately arrive at findings and recommended strategies for GWB's consideration.



Analysis of Rhode Island's Current Work-Based Learning Efforts

As a first step toward understanding the strengths and gaps of Rhode Island's current work-based learning efforts, ESG analyzed the K-12 programs led by GWB using the state's programmatic records, which included data on participation, cost, industry representation, and to the extent possible, outcomes.

The GWB funds two different work-based learning programs: the Work Immersion program, which aims to provide work experience for college and K-12 CTE students as well as unemployed adults; and the Summer Youth Employment program, which provides funding through the two local workforce boards – the Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island and the Providence-Cranston Workforce Investment Board – to be competitively awarded to sub-grantees to provide summer employment for youth ages 14-24. In total, the GWB allocated approximately \$2.8M in FY17 to support these programs.

Work Immersion Program

Funding

Of the \$2.8M disbursed by the GWB for work-based learning experiences, approximately \$1M of that was designated for the Work Immersion program in FY17. Half of that came from the Job Development Fund, which is a tax on employers that generates revenue of about \$13M per year. The remaining funds for Work Immersion come from general revenue and grants. The average program cost per participant is about \$2200, and funding is expected to decline by 17 percent to about \$830k in FY18. Work Immersion provides a 50 percent reimbursement to employers who host interns. Employers who eventually hire these interns receive an additional 25 percent reimbursement.

Program Parameters

While the program is legislated to focus on unemployed adults and students enrolled in college, CTE students in their junior or senior year of high school who are at least 16 years old with a minimum 2.0 GPA are also eligible to participate in a Work Immersion experience. The program is not currently offered to non-CTE students. Participants must complete at least 45 contact hours and not more than 400 hours within a 10-week period of time; on average, CTE students complete 330 contact hours. Participating students are paid for their work by employers with compensation minimally set at \$9.60 per hour - minimum wage in Rhode Island – ranging up to a maximum of \$20 per hour. The median wage for participating CTE students in FY17 was \$11 per hour, while college students earned \$13 per hour and unemployed adults earned \$13.63 per hour.

Each participating employer in the Work Immersion program is permitted to hire up to 10 students within a school year. In FY16, 308 businesses hired 737 interns. In FY17 however, that number dropped to 428 interns. Across both of those years, high school CTE students made up only 12 percent of the total number of participants. While those numbers are relatively low largely due to programmatic

requirements set out in law, the relationships developed through those experiences may well serve as fertile ground to recruit employers into offering more and better work-based learning experiences in the future.

Work Immersion experiences are expected to provide a meaningful learning opportunity defined as a work experience that is rigorous and relevant and, in the case of CTE students, connected to their program of study.

Alignment with Labor Market Needs

Rhode Island commissioned a study through the Brookings Institute, the results of which were released in January 2016 and are presently used by the state as the north star of its economic development efforts. In its recommendations, Brookings identified five priority industries key to Rhode Island's long-term economic success - Biomedical Innovation; Information Technology, Cyber, and Data Analytics; Defense Shipbuilding and Maritime; Advanced Business Services; and Design, Food, and Custom Manufacturing – and two “opportunity” industries that pay well for those without a four-year degree in Transportation Distribution and Logistics as well as Arts, Education, Hospitality, and Tourism. Those industries to date are under-represented among participants in the Work Immersion program. In FY17, the most prevalent Workforce Immersion industries for K-12 CTE participants were (in order) Education Services, Other Services, and Manufacturing.

In addition, hiring for long-term employment for those who complete the Workforce Immersion experiences appears to some extent to fall along age lines. Many unemployed adults are hired out of the program and usually find such opportunities in manufacturing, healthcare, and hospitality. However, college students do not fare as well with less than half of those who complete the Workforce Immersion experience receiving hiring offers. Those that do receive job offers are generally in Information Technology and professional services. Also, there are indications from focus groups and phone interviews that some employers may leverage Work Immersion as a way to fill their temporary job openings rather than placing individuals in long-term, high-value job opportunities.

Outcomes

While Work Immersion has reached over 300 employers, there remain many employers who lack awareness of the program as a means to growing their workforce. In addition, the state has few records on the quality of the offerings. It has conducted focus groups at both the high school and college levels to gather feedback, and employers must assess student employability skill acquisition via a feedback form before they are able to draw down reimbursement. Throughout the experience, school-based counselors monitor for quality by ensuring that each worksite is safe, that employers have the correct worker's comp insurance, that student attendance is high (via timesheets), and that experiences are productive as determined through site visits, phone calls, and other means such as a contract between employers, students, and parents that outlines roles and responsibilities. However, the extent to which records on these things are maintained or analyzed for programmatic feedback is not clear.

Programmatic Evolution

The GWB has proactively taken each of these factors into consideration and has already proposed several changes to the program going forward. It has considered amending the eligibility requirements to enable more college and K-12 CTE students to participate in the program. Most importantly, they have begun to require that CTE Work Immersion experiences be offered only in high-wage, high-demand fields aligned with the Rhode Island Department of Education's (RIDE) designated career pathways.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Funding

Of the \$2.8M allocated by GWB for work-based learning, \$1.8M from the Job Development Fund supports the Summer Youth Employment Program and is disbursed competitively by the two local workforce boards. The Workforce Partnership of Greater Rhode Island (GRI) most recently received \$1.15M, and the Providence-Cranston Workforce Investment Board received \$650k. This represents a 17 percent increase from the previous fiscal year's funding level.

Program Parameters

Eligible recipients of these funds awarded through the workforce boards include Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), non-profit and for-profit organizations, public agencies, and educational institutions that serve youth ages 14-24. In FY17, GRI awarded 11 sub-grants, all of which appear to be non-profit organizations except for two educational institutions. The Providence-Cranston Board awarded nine sub-grants, all of which appear to be CBOs except for one hospital and one educational institution. Though grant awards are primarily made to CBOs, they in turn may make sub-awards to non-CBOs. In total, the Summer Youth Employment Program served 1300 youth in FY17. The two local workforce boards have responsibility primarily for competitively awarding funds and fulfilling GWB reporting requirements.

While the program has noble intentions, it could appropriately be termed a soft version of work-based learning, or simply a summer jobs program, that is not aligned with participating students' coursework or previous academic preparation or labor market need and instead focuses rather exclusively on developing job readiness skills. A minimum of 50 percent of the students accepted into the program must be recruited from the local youth centers that predominantly serve at-risk students and are disconnected from the K-12 and postsecondary education systems. This removes participating employers' opportunity to select students based on their readiness and fit for work-based learning experiences as demonstrated by resumes, interviews, and other assessment techniques. Sub-grantees can receive waivers for this 50 percent requirement under two conditions. First, if the sub-grantee cannot get 50 percent of the target at-risk youth population from the center as confirmed by the center, the sub-grantee can instead serve the number of at-risk youth that can be recruited from that center; Or, if the sub-grantee offers youth workforce development services before and after the summer

session that serves a similar population, the 50 percent requirement can be waived. Only four of the 11 GRI sub-grantees expected to serve 50 percent or more at-risk youth in FY17. In addition, because most of those students are served by the youth centers year-round, it is difficult for GWB to trace participation back to high schools where these students are enrolled to clearly understand the geographic reach of their efforts.

Sub-grantee programs can serve kids from one or more “tiers” by offering them six-week work-based learning experiences. Tier one is comprised of 14-15-year-old students and offers exploratory career opportunities. Tier two is for 16-18-year-old students and gives higher-level responsibility opportunities to them. And tier three is for 19-24-year-old youth who can manage tasks and projects independently and behave appropriately in the workplace. Seven of GRI’s 11 sub-grantees purport to serve all three tiers. Across the two sets of sub-grantees, 14-15 and 16-18-year-olds are served equally; 19-24-year-olds lag behind making up only 13 percent of the youth receiving services. African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian students are served relatively equally. Many sub-grantees appear to find worksite placements for kids in various organizations and businesses that are required to pay kids minimum wage ranging from \$7.20-\$9.60 per hour, depending on age for their five weeks of work. (Program week 1 is a training week.) The programmatic cost per student through GRI on average is \$1,358. Participating students can receive payment for no more than 120 hours of work.

Work-site experiences are intended to provide students with opportunities in high-wage, high-demand fields, and every participating child is expected to complete a project or workplace portfolio. However, collecting data on the extent to which students are placed into such roles has proven to be difficult since local workforce boards do not currently have the data capacity to track and report this information. Based on the data that has been provided to the GWB, the program does not appear to be well aligned with priority industries with approximately half of experiences being unaligned. Within those that are aligned with priority industries, it is difficult to determine within which occupations the students are working. For example, if a student is placed at CVS, he or she could be developing coding skills, learning about pharmacy tech, or working as a cashier. In addition, the procedure for follow-up reporting is unclear, so it is difficult to know the extent to which each sub-grantee fulfilled what it proposed in its grant application. Going forward, more work should be done to improve the data mining abilities of the workforce boards so that GWB can better understand how employers and industry are better connected to those projects.

Programmatic Evolution

The GWB recognizes the shortcomings in this program and is proactively working to make helpful, industry-aligned changes. In particular, GWB is modifying program regulations to require that summer work-based learning experiences be both aligned with the five high-wage, high-demand priority industry sectors and connected more tightly to students’ K-12 academic experiences. They plan to require the local workforce boards to work in partnership with schools and employers to help sub-grantees find placements within the priority industry sectors.

Examination of Work-Based Learning Practices in Leading States

ESG continued its work by reviewing work-based learning efforts in four leading states: Delaware, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Tennessee. This included conducting targeted interviews and synthesizing existing programmatic information to identify ways in which Rhode Island can improve its work-based learning programs based on the promising practices and lessons learned from these states. The examination of each state's work-based learning system focused on several key questions:

- What does the **programmatic design** look like from a state level, including alignment with high-skill, high-demand sectors? What incentives are put in place to increase participation rates of both employers and students?
- What **standards or criteria** are work-based learning providers required to meet in offering experiences to K-12 students? What requirements are in place for providers to **assess skills** gained through work-based learning?
- What is known about the state's work-based learning providers? What **data** is collected on participating students and employers?
- How are K-12 work-based learning efforts **aligned with postsecondary education and workforce development**?
- What **funding** sources does the state use to support this work?

Based on the information gathered from the state interviews and synthesis of available programmatic information, ESG has developed state profiles that highlight possible areas of connection for Rhode Island. It is also worth noting that while state leaders in all interviews mentioned their explicit focus on the continuum of work-based learning activities – i.e. those beginning with career awareness and exploration activities in middle schools and progressing to experiences like internships and pre-apprenticeships in high school – the following state profiles are intentionally focused on the more intensive student placement experiences since that is what Rhode Island seeks to scale.

Delaware

Like Rhode Island, Delaware has set a bold goal of scaling high-quality work-based learning across the state and has begun to take strong steps to build the necessary programmatic infrastructure and put strong incentives in place to accomplish that vision. Delaware has engaged employers, postsecondary partners, and district staff in helping to design a comprehensive strategy to strengthen and scale high-quality internships for high school students as part of their broader effort to prepare students for continuing education and competitive employment. The strategy they have begun to execute aims to place roughly half of the students who complete a CTE pathway into an internship by 2018-2019, which represents about one-fourth of their graduating class.

Programmatic Design

To ensure that internships are rigorous, relevant, and accessible to students, Delaware has recently embedded those student placement experiences within state-developed career pathways through something known as a “career immersion course”. As the third course of a sequenced program of study, CTE concentrators will complete this structured 250+ hour experience. The first 30 hours will seek to develop the skills students need to be successful at a workplace in areas such as resume writing, interviewing, financial literacy, professional goal setting, and general employability skills. Students will then complete the remaining 220+ hours through an internship in their field of study that allows them to apply the knowledge they have acquired in the classroom and develop technical skills to be successful in their select occupation. These paid experiences can occur during the school day, in the evening, over weekends, or in the summer.

Delaware’s 21st Century Work-Based Learning Vision & Goal

Delaware students will be prepared for continuing education and competitive employment with greater access to a statewide work-based learning system. By school year 2018-19, Delaware’s work-based learning system will support **2,500 high school students** and 5,700 post-secondary students as they pursue “career immersion” experiences that are aligned with their career pathway.

Including internships as part of an actual course within a specific pathway provides two important side benefits to the state. First, it enables them to award course credit to students who complete the full 250+ hours with satisfactory evaluations. Second, Delaware will be able to use the course codes to capture and report participation in occupation-specific internships and use that information in its economic development efforts.

Employer Requirements

Delaware employers who accept interns must abide by three primary requirements. They must agree to provide and supervise the 220 contact hours for students. As mentioned above, they must pay students for their work. Many employers pay students directly, but some opt for the state-approved option of instead providing college scholarships. Finally, employers must evaluate the extent to which each intern meets established goals and develops core technical and professional skills as a result of that experience. Delaware is in the process of developing an assessment tool for use by employers for work-based learning experiences, and once it is developed, the state plans to offer training to both districts and employers on how to use it to more effectively articulate the skills that are developed through these experiences.

Delaware recognizes that putting requirements in place for employers alone will not bring about consistently high-quality internship experiences. To that end, the state is developing process tools and training opportunities (as well as professional development options for educators) that will include specific information around cost, student availability/scheduling, skill development, and provider

requirements to make it easier for both employers and districts to offer work-based learning that is aligned with the state's long-term economic growth strategies.

Intermediary

Scaling internships in a way that consistently offers focused, high-quality student experiences across the state is difficult. To help overcome that challenge, Delaware has recently enlisted the help of Delaware Technical and Community College ("Del Tech"), the statewide community college system, to serve as a statewide intermediary to ensure streamlined, consistent work-based learning routines and messaging across the state for high school students as well as their own college students. Since their mission is workforce development, Del Tech has campuses statewide and strong relationships with employers already in place, both of which position it well to partner with high schools.

In this intermediary role, Del Tech will serve several different functions. First and perhaps foremost, it will serve as a single point of access to the employer community to produce work-based learning opportunities at scale that are responsive to priority labor market needs. To execute this role well, Del Tech will employ coordinators in each of the state's three counties to work directly with employers to provide internships and with schools and businesses to coordinate related logistics and work through associated legal requirements.

To streamline the work, Del Tech will also manage a technology platform to match students and schools with employers to help with career exploration and set up high-quality work-based learning experiences across the state. The electronic matching platform, SPARC (Success Pathways and Roads to Careers), was designed by the Delaware Business Roundtable Education Committee, the Delaware Department of Education, and the United Way of Delaware to serve several purposes:

- To enable students to match their interests to available career options and connect with a 'Career Coach' from industry who can provide virtual mentoring;
- To help schools access and download resources to help support career exploration activities, including how-to guides for career fairs as well as sample invitation letters to employers;
- To provide employers with a clear vehicle for sharing information about work-based learning opportunities with students; and
- To enable Del Tech to directly connect schools and businesses by matching services that employers can provide with those schools need, ranging from guest speakers and job shadowing to internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

Beyond serving as a broker of work-based learning experiences, Del Tech is assuming a larger role within the state's economic development efforts. It will organize employers across sectors, especially where there is no Chamber of Commerce or trade association that might typically fill that role, to form industry councils to advise high schools on labor market trends and help guide annual curriculum and programming decisions. Del Tech is also supporting the development of a middle school course to

provide an introduction to the state's career pathway system, and to help students identify their interests and understand the path they can take through school to access those career interests.

Alignment

Employers, K-12 leaders, and higher education institutions have made it clear that Delaware must build alignment between its secondary and postsecondary career readiness work. Within work-based learning, the state is accomplishing that alignment through its career immersion courses that are offered as part of a program of study. As mentioned above, the unique code associated with each of those courses serves as a mechanism for both collecting data on completed work-based learning experiences, as well as awarding course credit to students for these experiences. In the longer term, Delaware intends to have students build a professional portfolio that documents their skill set as part of the career immersion course that could count for college credit through state postsecondary institutions' credit for prior learning policies. In collaboration with the state's Department of Labor, Delaware is also working on using that portfolio to certify a student as a registered pre-apprentice to allow them to enter a corresponding registered apprenticeship in the second or third year of the program, depending on the pathway.

Work-Based Learning Incentives

Delaware uses several different strategies to incentivize and scale work-based learning, including incorporating work-based learning in the state's accountability model and on school report cards, as well as using its weighted funding and program approval processes to incentivize and ensure the pathways contain these opportunities.

Employers and school districts have clearly conveyed that work-based learning must be part of the state's accountability system as a means of sending clear signals to schools about the importance of the work. Updates to the accountability system incorporated in the state's ESSA plan include reporting the number and percentage of students who successfully completed a work-based learning experience on school and district report cards under the category of college and/or career preparedness, beginning in the 2017-18 school year.

In addition, Delaware has begun to shift how it funds career pathways in an effort to incentivize state priorities in practice. Starting in the 2016-2017 school year, Delaware has applied weights to the state's general education funds through the student funding formula to grant more money to districts and schools for offering higher-level courses within career pathways, i.e. those that include work-based learning and dual enrollment. Districts receive baseline funding, or "x1 funding" for introductory pathways courses. To incentivize districts and schools to offer more pathways that include a full sequence of courses, the state has begun to weight funding for the third and fourth-level courses that typically require districts or schools to take on greater responsibility, such as making outreach to students and employers, having more equipment or resources available, and sometimes providing transportation for students. Since those efforts take more time and require more money, the state has

begun to provide “x3 funding” for those courses, which include dual enrollment and work-based learning experiences.

In the 2015-16 school year, Delaware shifted its Program of Study approval processes to require that pathways offer the opportunity for students to earn college credit, attain a meaningful industry-based credential where available and appropriate, and participate in a high-quality work-based learning experience. Local programs of study must be approved by the state every five years in order to receive funding. At year five, Delaware will notify the districts/schools that do not meet this requirement to give them the chance to make necessary course corrections. At year seven, if districts/schools have not made the necessary improvements, the x3 funding in that pathway for level three and four courses will be reduced to x1 funding. At year 10, funding will be withdrawn altogether for that program of study.

Massachusetts

Connecting Activities is a signature Massachusetts initiative linking education, business, and workforce development partners through the work of skilled intermediaries to help high schools prepare students for college and career through immersive work-based learning experiences. Since 2008, approximately 11,000 students per year on average have gained job experience through the Connecting Activities program. In FY16, over half of the state’s 398 high schools participated in the initiative, including career vocational technical education (CVTE) and comprehensive high schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. More than 10,000 students had immersive work-based learning experiences, or internships, that were brokered and supported by the Connecting Activities network in FY16, representing one out of every seven students in the graduating class. Massachusetts seeks to scale its program so that all students have an immersive career experience by the time they graduate high school as part of their pathway to future success.

Programmatic Design and Requirements, Including Intermediary

Led by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), Connecting Activities funds, appropriated through a separate line item in the state budget, are allocated through a competitive process to all sixteen local Workforce Development Boards in the state that serve as intermediaries to broker work-based learning experiences and offer career awareness and exploration activities to high school students. These experiences range from guest speaker series to internship programs, in partnership with high schools, local stakeholders, and employers. While each region has significant flexibility in how it organizes and staffs the Connecting Activities initiative in consultation with local school districts, ESE has developed a set of core performance expectations for the Workforce Development Boards. They must:

- Generate at least two times the amount of state funding in private sector wage matches, as stipulated by the enabling legislation;
- Establish goals for the number of student job placements that will be brokered and supported, and document their outcomes;
- Collect and report the number of Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plans completed;

- Establish goals for targeting students for work experience who are at risk of dropping out to support the ESE's major goal of improving graduation rates;
- Document the range of career awareness and exploration activities using the ESE's data-collection system;
- Provide quarterly progress reports against annual goals; and
- Participate in a range of technical assistance opportunities designed by ESE to ensure a common understanding of expectations, disseminate best practices, and keep the network current.

Workforce Development Board regions support the full continuum of work-based learning experiences, including lighter touch career awareness activities through deeper career preparation experiences. Though all regions must broker enough paid student placements to reach the required 2:1 wage match threshold, some placements are unpaid or subsidized. The sixteen Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) use Connecting Activities funding with a strong focus on investing in the necessary capacity at the heart of the intermediary role, with about 70 percent of funding used to support staff and 30 percent spent on direct student supports, like transportation to a worksite or incentives for student participation. None of the state funds can go towards student wages.

A critical component of the Connecting Activities initiative is the Massachusetts [Work-Based Learning Plan](#) (WBLP), a diagnostic, goal-setting and assessment tool designed to help structure internships and other WBL experiences in support of student mastery of skills needed for success in the workplace. ESE uses the WBLP to conduct an analysis of gains in student's employability skills and workplace/career specific skills as reported by providers through pre- and post-assessments of workplace experience. Employability skills assessed are considered essential to every career, while workplace/career specific skills are chosen specifically based on the placement sector and students' goals. Newly available in online and mobile web formats to be as accessible as possible, 72 percent of participating students utilized the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP) in FY16. The WBLP helps to create a database of information that houses student placement data and tracks important outcomes for the Workforce Development Boards to reach, including measures of student skill gain, the number of placements, number of employers, and wage matching.

Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)

The [Boston PIC](#) is one of sixteen Workforce Development Boards statewide managing Boston's one-stop career centers geared towards supporting job-seeking adults, as well as the city's school-to-career intermediary organization, convening cross-sector leaders to connect employers with schools and students with jobs and internships.

The PIC's overarching goal is to increase dramatically the number of students, both youth and adults, who earn the credentials necessary to secure employment and achieve financial independence with the opportunity to advance professionally.

In the summer of 2017, the PIC facilitated over **2,300 employer-paid, employer-supervised positions** for high school students. PIC Career Specialists also connected over 600 other students with community service jobs, sponsored by foundations and the public sector, who will benefit from the work-readiness skills gained in these placements. During the school year, hundreds of these students often continue working as paid interns or part-time employees, and many PIC employers typically continue to be involved in schools through career awareness activities.

Boston PIC uses its funding to place its Career specialists in schools to coordinate work-based learning experiences for students. They work closely with students before the summer to prepare them for summer work through a series of job readiness workshops and career exploration programs, and they continue to measure student progress throughout the year. The PIC's employer engagement staff supports employers throughout the process by coordinating interview schedules, hiring processes, and supervisor recruitment.

In Boston, nearly 1 in 5 jobs are in the healthcare field, and employment in the computer systems design industry almost tripled between 2008 and 2016. In alignment with the city's high-demand sectors, 39% of the direct placements PIC arranges were within the healthcare field, 19% with financial, investments and insurance and 8% within professional scientific and technical services. It is widely regarded as a successful intermediary model.

Alignment with Postsecondary and Workforce Development

Connecting Activities has helped to build bridges between the Massachusetts ESE and the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) as well as the local organizations they support. While Connecting Activities is designed to serve students of all skill and income levels, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and low-income students, there is strong alignment with the ESE's strategies related to dropout prevention, graduation rate improvement, and student engagement in order to offer supports for students at the highest risk of dropping out. Connecting Activities aims to be responsive to labor market needs and actively recruits employers in key STEM industries like health care, finance, biotechnology, advanced manufacturing, and Information Technology. Already strong in the health care sector, Connecting Activities aims for a substantial increase in other STEM placements in

FY17, driven by the new campaign led by Executive Office of Education (EOE) and the STEM Council. To date, completion of work-based learning through Connecting Activities does not quality for college credit.

Funding

Connecting Activities is funded annually through a line item appropriation in the state's budget, which has ranged from \$2M to \$7M since 2008. This investment consistently delivers a strong return through the 2:1 private employer match for funding wages of students at a private sector place of employment. This minimum match requirement has always been met by employers and is often exceeded at state and regional levels. During FY16, employers invested \$14,024,114 in wages to support student internships, based on a \$2.8M state appropriation, which equates to almost a 5:1 match.

Ohio

Like Rhode Island, Ohio was hit especially hard by the Great Recession of 2008. Many of its workers relied on manufacturing jobs that were outsourced or replaced by automation. The state aggressively developed strategies to revive its economy, and in 2012, Governor Kasich created his Office of Workforce Transformation to help grow a skilled workforce and connect employers with qualified workers.

This strong emphasis on workforce development has infiltrated all state agencies in Ohio, including the Department of Education, which has made work-based learning a top priority in the last several years. It emphasizes that importance through a statewide definition for high school experiences, reporting school-level participation rates, creating tools and resources for districts and schools, and engaging a statewide intermediary for coordination services.

Programmatic Design/Requirements

Work-based learning for high school students in Ohio is defined as an experience that takes place off school grounds at an employer worksite to give students an opportunity to not only develop technical skills but also understand workplace culture and acquire the professional skills needed to interact appropriately in a workplace. Internships can take place during or after school, on the weekend, or over the summer.

Work-based learning is viewed as an extension of classroom learning in a chosen pathway. Experiences must be aligned to a student's program of study or career goals, integrate academic content, and be documented with training /learning plans and evaluation forms. The education partner works with the supervising employer to build a locally driven, personalized learning and training plan, including intended student outcomes, and both partners jointly evaluate the extent to which the student meets the goals outlined in the plan.

Intermediary

Scaling work-based learning in any state in a high-quality way, but especially a large state like OH, requires coordination of many moving parts to ensure consistency and rigor across experiences. One challenge Ohio has confronted is the confusion among employers regarding the most appropriate point of contact for work based learning opportunities within different districts and schools. Frustrated employers expressed an interest in having a central organization serve as that point of contact and broker work-based learning experiences for students.

Ohio's six College Tech Prep Regional Centers already serve as the liaison to the 91 career-technical planning districts, 23 community colleges, and 14 universities across the state to ensure high-quality career-technical education programs for students, including work-based learning. These Regional Centers are jointly managed by the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the Office of Career-Technical Education at Ohio Department of Education. The state is now re-envisioning the Centers and adding onto their existing roles and responsibilities so they can help schools identify work-based learning placements, implement student training plans, and coordinate employer engagement. Ohio has also signed a memorandum of understanding with Adecco, a global staffing firm, to address employer barriers to offering work based learning placements, like liability associated with hiring interns and challenges with processing them on payroll. Through this agreement, Adecco serves as the employer of record, i.e. the student is technically employed by Adecco, who charges employers a slightly higher hourly rate than employers agree to pay students in exchange for assuming liability, mitigating risk, and in some cases handling human resources issues, for the district – all at no cost to the state.

Leveraging Adecco as an Intermediary

In July 2017, the Ohio Department of Education and the Adecco Group announced an MOU to partner on work-based learning and apprenticeships for high school students.

The Adecco Group serves multiple roles through this agreement. Serving as the single point of contact for employers, Adecco will coordinate on-the-job training programs tailored to each business' needs, serving as not only a resource to employers interested in exploring work-based learning, but also as a liaison between employers and educators to ensure that all state requirements are met. Adecco is also able to serve as the Employer of Record for work-based learning participants ages 16 or older.

The Adecco Group has also partnered with Kentucky's Department of Education and area employers on a program, Youth Employment Solutions (YES!), geared toward developing the state's talent pool in 2016. Now in its third year, 96 percent of YES! students who have completed the program have gone on to continue their education, extend their time in the program, or receive a full-time job offer.

Alignment with Postsecondary and Workforce Development

In Ohio, students who complete an internship that meets the state's requirements have the opportunity to earn course credit. Currently, high schools have several credit [options available to them](#) to either

enhance a career-related course by requiring that work-based learning be a component of it, or use work-based learning to replace a course through credit flexibility provisions. Clear documentation of the internship, alignment of the experience with student training agreements, and effective supervision of the student during the internship are required components of both options. Going forward, Ohio will formalize opportunities to earn course credit through state policy with a framework due to be finalized by the end of 2017 that will enable students to not only earn course credit for work-based learning but also earn both academic credit and CTE credit for a single work-based learning experience. The forthcoming framework will also address how credit for work-based learning could affect GPA. Once that is finalized, Ohio plans to roll out comprehensive marking and technical assistance to schools and districts to help them implement this policy in a more systemic way.

In terms of postsecondary alignment, Ohio requires that every state-approved CTE program include postsecondary opportunities for students, ranging from a minimum of earning three college credits up to a full associate's degree while in high school. Because almost all of the agreements that provide this opportunity have been bilateral articulation agreements, i.e. agreements between a single institution of higher education and a school district, Ohio is working to build statewide agreements. The Department of Education currently has 45 percent of courses articulated for postsecondary credit, with a goal to have 75 percent articulated by 2019.

Work-based Learning Incentives

Ohio uses several different strategies to incentivize strong, demand-driven career readiness efforts generally and work-based learning specifically in its districts and schools. Ohio's funding formula provides weighted funding for students enrolled in CTE beyond the core per-pupil allotments. Moreover, this weighted funding for CTE is tiered so that courses in priority sectors "earn" higher funding than those that are not. This incentivizes districts and schools to offer courses in priority sectors to help meet the state's economic development priorities. Work-based learning within these CTE programs of study are given a course code, which enables districts to report occupation-specific work-based learning so that the state can track participation rates against its workforce development efforts.

Incorporating work-based learning into accountability reporting for schools and districts is helping to drive prioritization at the local level. Over the past three years, the state has worked with stakeholders in the field to build on the definition of work-based learning so that it can be used as an accountability metric within the state's CTE report card. In addition, the State Board of Education recently decided to add work-based learning as a public report for all students, not just CTE students, on district and school report cards. This is part of their broader effort to build an online dashboard that will show career preparation and pathway completion, including work-based learning participation and placement rates, as well as credentials earned, tightness of fit between program offerings and regional in-demand jobs, WorkKeys data, Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO) engagement, and other relevant data points.

Ohio strongly believes that since it is asking districts and schools to prioritize work-based learning, and because the state is measuring and reporting work-based learning, it must put tools and resources into the hands of districts and schools to help them do it well. Ohio has invested significant time and resources in developing a [toolkit](#) that provides benefits, guidelines, and resources that are unique to three key stakeholder groups: families and students, districts and schools, and business and community partners. It also provides technical assistance to districts and schools to help strengthen their work-based learning efforts.

Tennessee

While each of the states profiled in this report is a work-based learning leader in its own right, Tennessee has demonstrated impressive progress in building a statewide model that is aligned with the needs of priority industry sectors and integrated with high school students' programs of study. Tennessee has focused intentionally on setting up clear expectations for work-based learning, including the development of a detailed definition for quality work based learning experiences spanning career awareness, exploration, and preparation and training, as well as developing supports, templates, guides and other resources to drive quality. What is perhaps most notable is that Tennessee built this statewide program without enhanced, incentivized state funding streams or targeted legislation.

Programmatic Design/Requirements

Tennessee has developed a detailed [Work-Based Learning Policy Guide](#) that provides clear, explicit guidance to districts and employers around program design. As shown below, Tennessee has broken high-quality work-based learning experiences into 12 specific elements.

Tennessee's Elements of Quality Work Based Learning Programs

1. a purposeful focus on applied learning in preparation for postsecondary education and careers
2. learning outcomes as the driver for designing experiences and learning plans
3. relevance to student interests, their high school Plan of Study, and learning goals
4. integration with curriculum or connection to related instruction
5. sufficient variety to provide exposure to multiple career options
6. sufficient depth to allow for employability skill development and professional community engagement
7. ongoing interaction with professionals from industry and the community
8. close supervision from teachers and employers
9. opportunities for reflection and analysis
10. assessment of student learning that is aligned with industry-specific expectations
11. alignment with postsecondary and career opportunities regionally
12. documentation of student learning through the development of artifacts and portfolios

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, [Work Based Learning Policy Guide](#), May 2017

From an infrastructure perspective, each district in Tennessee with secondary grades has a work-based learning coordinator who acts as a liaison or intermediary between the district and employers in placing students into experiences and ensuring that employer requirements and deliverables are met. For some of the larger districts, there are school-based coordinators housed at multiple high schools. These school-based coordinators serve as the primary point of contact for all work-based learning functions at the school and/or district as well as the teacher of record for all related work-based learning courses. While there are several districts that provide - or work with local intermediaries to provide - paid work-based learning experiences and/or mitigate employer liability, the state does not provide direct funding to districts beyond existing funding streams found in competitive state grants through the Departments of Education, Labor, and the Higher Education Commission and through federal funds (e.g. Perkins basic and reserve, WIOA). Districts can either cover their students through their own umbrella insurance policy or establish agreements with local staffing firms as necessary. However, Tennessee does use part of its Perkins funding to provide small stipends for regional work-based learning coordinators who provide monthly training and professional development for all district work-based learning coordinators and serve on a statewide work-based learning advisory council.

Work-based learning courses are intended to provide an opportunity for 11th and 12th grade students to apply the skills and knowledge learned in their CTE and general education courses within a professional work environment. These experiences can be classroom-based or virtual if conditions warrant. In addition to the policy guide, Tennessee has developed [Work-Based Learning Career Practicum Standards](#) that outline the requirements for the capstone work-based learning internship experiences. Enrolled students earn high school course credit. All Tennessee promoted work-based learning courses must include:

- Utilization of a personalized learning plan, (described in more detail below under the Assessment of Work-based Learning Experiences)
- Development of a portfolio to demonstrate students' employability skill development, and
- Employment of an evaluation process to ensure that experiences are high-quality for the student.

Prior to participating in the practicum course, students must exhibit "work readiness attitudes and skills". Employers are required to provide a dedicated workplace mentor to set professional expectations for quality of work, provide feedback on the project and its progress, and evaluate the student's employability skill development. Tennessee has a sample [employer agreement](#) that school-based coordinators customize based on industry conditions unique to each student's work-based learning experience to especially address things like equipment and safety concerns. They are also in the process of building more specific guides for employers beyond [WBL 101 for Industry](#). In addition, Tennessee has put requirements in place for work-based learning providers related to alignment with students' high school plan of study, worksite attendance requirements, compensation for student work, student safety, and documentation of the experience. Students are required to maintain an onsite up-to-date Training Agreement and Safety Training Log about their experience.

Assessment of Work-based Learning Experiences

The [Personalized Learning Plan Packet](#) mentioned above and [Student Skills Assessment Rubric](#) are the primary tools used to assess work-based learning experiences. The content of the ‘packet’ is now available through an online portal system, which work-based learning coordinators use to enter their students’ placement information, providing an initial repository of information of the work-based learning across the state. The packet asks students to consider past experiences and interests, as well as future career and educational goals, and document examples and evidence for their skill development, including application of academic, technical, career navigation, 21st century learning and innovation (employability) skills, and personal and social knowledge and skills, during the WBL experience. Tennessee also requires the completion of a [rubric](#) to measure employability skills like collaboration, speaking and listening, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, and workplace and career navigation which is uploaded into the state portal. The state is also working on a skills assessment designed to measure student skill growth pre- and post-placement – beyond employer or student-reported ratings on a rubric – as a part of the required survey for specific industries.

Alignment with Postsecondary and Workforce Development

One important part of Tennessee’s definition of high quality work-based learning is the requirement that such experiences be aligned with postsecondary and regional career opportunities. Work-based learning experiences and the practicum course are embedded throughout Tennessee’s promoted career and technical education’s (CTE) programs of study. This purposeful embeddedness is intended to ensure educators and students are making the necessary allowances in student planning and course scheduling so that all qualified students are able to partake in work-based learning experiences. As existing programs of study are evaluated, which occurs annually, or new programs of study come online, Tennessee appropriately identifies where in the course sequencing students should be exposed to or enrolled in work-based learning.

Through the complementary [Work Ethic Diploma](#) initiative, students in 39 high schools across 17 districts can work toward the ‘work ethic diploma’, effectively a supplemental workforce readiness credential, that earn students preferential interviewing with 40 participating employers. To receive this distinction, a student must earn a minimum of 20 points across various [standards](#), including attendance, discipline, GPA, advanced coursework, as well as a regular high school diploma. Students who participate in a work-based learning placement earn 3 points toward the Work Ethic Diploma.

In addition, students who have completed a work-based learning experience and who go on to an aligned area of study in Tennessee’s technical college system can earn program hours as an approved prior learning (PLA) experience. The award is determined by the individual technical college.

Work-Based Learning Incentives

Tennessee has put several incentives in place to drive their work-based learning agenda. Chief among them is work-based learning’s inclusion within the state accountability system. Beginning in school year

2017-18, Tennessee will use the data collected from work-based learning course codes to incorporate participation rates as a transparency indicator on district report cards to provide a more complete picture of students' readiness for college and career. It is also identified as a quality indicator for federal reporting.

Conclusion

Though program design and requirements may vary, leading states around the country are building and scaling work-based learning experiences for students to help them gain real-world skills on the road to meaningful employment. By leveraging the lessons learned and promising practices from other states, Rhode Island has an opportunity to build on its existing work to rapidly improve and scale its work-based learning system for high school students.

Rhode Island Work-Based Learning Findings

Rhode Island's goal of having 70 percent of its citizens earn a high-value postsecondary credential by 2025 is ambitious. *PrepareRI*, a robust governor-led, statewide initiative to prepare all youth with the skills needed for good jobs, has served as the catalyst for the state to focus on preparing all students for both college and careers. As part of working toward those credentialing and job readiness goals, education and economic development leaders have prioritized work-based learning for high school students as a strong strategy to help develop important technical skills and professional relationships that students will need in industries that are essential to the state's long-term economic success.

ESG has examined Rhode Island's current work-based learning efforts through data analysis, phone interviews with cross-sector leaders, and focus groups that included educators, non-profit leaders, employers, and industry associations. It found that there are many strengths within Rhode Island's current work. For example, many high school students are being served by work-based learning through schools, youth centers, and other organizations. A number of districts already prioritize work-based learning as part of a comprehensive effort to prepare students for college and career. GWB has begun the hard work to define high-quality work-based learning as experiences that are rigorous, relevant, reflective, interactive, and integrative. And early steps are being taken to build demand-driven work-based learning experiences for high school students so they are more tightly aligned with priority industries.

ESG's work builds off this momentum. Because this project was intended to focus first and foremost on identifying areas in need of improvement, the following findings focus primarily on those improvement opportunities. They summarize key takeaways from analyses and offer specific recommendations for the work ahead, drawing from the efforts of leading states, to help Rhode Island reach its goal of ensuring that all high school students have access to a high-quality work-based learning experience before graduation.

Work-Based Learning Findings: Employer-Facing

Committed, Engaged Business Partners

It is evident that the employer community at large – leaders of large and small companies as well as industry associations – support the 70% credential attainment goal and appreciate the state's efforts to align education to workforce needs. They are willing and able to be part of the solution, especially since the solution intends to produce talent they need within their ranks. Many have been active in providing work-based learning experiences for high school students, especially through CTE centers, and are developing the technical skills that students need in priority industries. This will serve as a strong foothold for launching more embedded statewide work.

Uncertain Value Proposition to Employers

While employers are open to a range of talent sourcing and development strategies, they express some uncertainty regarding the value high school students bring to industry skill needs, generally perceiving the college and/or adult education pipeline as a better match. While employers often seem to view working with high school students more as a charitable or philanthropic contribution than as a partial solution to their talent acquisition needs, they appear to be open to providing high-quality experiences as a strategy to prepare students for the workplace generally and also for their pipeline specifically.

Duplication of Employer Effort

Because there is no central coordinating mechanism for K-12 work-based learning efforts, employers often have to interact with multiple districts and schools, which requires them to give the same “pitch” over and over to recruit students to internships. This significantly increases the amount of time and energy they have to devote to filling their internship slots.

Also, while sector coordination appears to be growing in Rhode Island, it is still relatively nascent, which means that employers within any given industry are often working in parallel to secure work-based learning participants as opposed to coordinating their efforts where possible to create efficiencies.

Employer Barriers

Employers voice concern about three barriers in particular that often stand in their way of offering more and better experiences to students. First, there is considerable liability associated with having high school-aged students in certain worksites. This is common to both businesses that operate heavy machinery as well as those that deal with sensitive information or have high-security protocols. Some employers have addressed that by hiring students as employees during internships so they are included under the employer’s insurance policy. Others see that as a hard barrier in terms of the types of worksites students can visit and/or the types of work students can take on during an internship.

Second, scheduling can be a challenge. Because employers often need a lengthy period of time to teach sophisticated technical skills to interns, they find it difficult to offer the more rigorous forms of work-based learning during school hours within the confines of a traditional school schedule. Many noted that flexibility is needed in scheduling to ensure that experiences can happen over longer blocks of time, including evenings, weekends, and summers.

A third barrier that employers have experienced in recruiting students to internships is ensuring that students, especially those from high-poverty areas, are able to get to job sites safely and without cost. Taking Uber or public transportation is often beyond the financial means of students and their families, which unfairly prevents them from being able to participate in a development opportunity that could lead to a meaningful career.

Student Readiness and Selection

Employers also indicate that high school students generally are often not ready for a professional workplace experience. They need prior professional skills training before they participate in an internship. In addition, employers voice concern over GWB policy in the Summer Youth Employment program that requires employers to select at least half of their interns from centers that serve at-risk youth who are often not ready for industry-based experiences. For those employers who view work-based learning as a talent sourcing strategy, they take seriously the screening process to determine who may potentially be a good long-term fit for their employment needs. They find it difficult to take a population of students who often lack workplace readiness and place them into demand-driven training opportunities, and they recognize that it is unfair to students to place them in such a role for which they are unprepared.

Bureaucratic Interferences

In working with GWB programs, some employers cite that the application process through local workforce boards for the Summer Youth Employment program adds a layer of confusion and run around that ultimately makes for an inefficient and cumbersome process.

Employer Capacity

With over 75% of Rhode Island businesses having fewer than 25 employees, scaling high-quality work-based learning experiences is a challenge. Few employers – large or small - have the resources or bandwidth to hire on temporary talent and invest significantly in developing that talent, which is often time and labor intensive. That means they have to prioritize their efforts within work-based learning, and it's best spent focusing on the experiences themselves with little time leftover to deal with logistics, human resource requirements, or student placement.

In addition, many industries and associations are new to the world of work-based learning for high school students. They voiced a need for better support and clearer guidance in designing high-quality opportunities for students. Because they are not familiar with the high school curriculum, they find it difficult to design experiences that are aligned with students' classroom learning. This means that there is an unnecessarily large learning curve for students as they step into internships that require knowledge they have not yet acquired, which requires employers to spend even more time training them

Work-Based Learning Findings: State-Facing

Strong Pillars

Rhode Island has strong pillars in place to form a solid foundation from which to build and scale K-12 work-based learning. It has a clear credential attainment goal. It has identified five "advanced" or priority industries and two opportunity industries with which work-based learning experiences can be aligned. Cross-sector state leaders have established it as a priority and are focused on it as a skill development strategy to help prepare students for good jobs. Work has begun to create and revise K-12

regulations to support statewide development, including revision of seat time regulations to allow work-based learning to count for course credit. Coordinators are in place in most high schools across the state to play a fundamental role in placing students in high-quality experiences. And a number of districts and schools, especially CTE Centers, already prioritize work-based learning as part a comprehensive college and career readiness strategy. The combination of these conditions will be important in helping the state build out its program to ensure that every high school student has access to a high-quality experience before graduation.

Nascent Vision and Guidance

While state leaders have recently identified work-based learning as a key strategy for helping to prepare all students for economic and career success, that vision is in its infancy and has not yet filtered through the SEA to districts and schools. There is not yet a systematic effort in place to build opportunity for high-quality work-based learning into all students' high school experience; the work-based learning that is happening among high school students through schools is almost exclusively through the technical high schools, which may unintentionally convey that work-based learning is for CTE students only. Awareness of work-based learning happening within comprehensive high schools is scant. In addition, a clear set of standards guiding what constitutes a high-quality work-based learning experience for high school students has not been developed. In the absence of that clear guidance, many local districts and schools have developed their own standards for work-based learning. On the one hand, that shows great initiative and strong planning on their part. On the other hand, it has unintentionally created a number of work-based learning protocols across the state that are sometimes in conflict with one another and often place undue burden on employers to design and offer customized internships rather than develop a core suite of experiences that can be offered across all high schools.

Little Infrastructure among Comprehensive High Schools

Because the vision for work-based learning is under development, clear signals about the importance of work-based learning have not been delivered to districts and schools, so work-based learning has not been prioritized to the desired extent within secondary schools' efforts to prepare all students for high-value careers. Instead, the career readiness focus has been on strengthening career pathways generally and bringing them more meaningfully into comprehensive high schools. Absent from that important early pathways work has been putting systems and resources in place to prioritize work-based learning and help it grow. Metrics for success have not yet been established, and accountability-related efforts are in early stages to incentivize schools to make this a priority. In addition, the state may not have the technical capacity to collect data on work-based learning participation and completion, so little is known about the quality and range of experiences that have been provided thus far.

Range of Experiences within CTE

Within CTE broadly (and CTE centers in particular), there is promising infrastructure and prioritization in place to drive high-quality work-based learning that helps students develop the technical skills and professional relationships necessary to find a good job. While work-based learning is stressed and

offered in a high-quality way within some districts and schools, the quality and scale of experiences across schools seems to be inconsistent. For example, some schools have upwards of 75 percent of their graduates participating in work-based learning while others have considerably less. Program of study approval and funding levers at the state level are deployed sub-optimally.

Misaligned Experiences

Rhode Island has identified five priority industries that are key to the state's long-term economic prosperity: biomedical; Information Technology; defense shipping and maritime; advanced business services; and design, food, and custom manufacturing. Outside of school-based experiences, students have access to work-based learning opportunities through two GWB programs: Work Immersion and Summer Youth Employment. While both have set expectations that experiences be aligned with priority industries, neither program seems to have hit that mark as fully as intended, although it is difficult to determine that degree of alignment because of data collection and reporting challenges. Based on data that has been reported to the GWB, the Summer Youth Employment Program seems to have awarded nearly all funding to non-profit organizations (as opposed to industry), which has led to work-based learning experiences that are not necessarily aligned with labor market need. In fact, in FY18, nearly one-third of experiences provided through the program were in the Child and Youth Services Industry, and more than one-fourth of participating youth (primarily students ages 14 to 17) were placed in experiences within the non-profit organizations themselves.

On the flip side, the Work Immersion program tends to do a better job of offering industry-aligned experiences, but in FY17, the most prevalent industries were (in order) Education Services, Other Services, and Manufacturing. In addition, of the high school students who participate, only CTE students are eligible, and there are very few of them at that. Over the last several years, approximately 12 percent of Work Immersion program participants were CTE students. The rest were postsecondary or adult education students.

Nascent Assessments

Across all state- or school-based work-based learning experiences for high school students, skill development is softly assessed. Employers respond to a set of general questions regarding participation, but they do not assess the extent to which technical skills were acquired through the experience. There is, however, an attempt on the part of experiences provided through CTE schools and the Work Immersion program to align those experiences with students' program of study.

Tension between Professional and Technical Skills

Moreover, within the Summer Youth Employment program, there is a pronounced tension between the appropriate balance between technical and professional skill development. Those who represent youth centers serving the most at-risk students feel strongly that these experiences should be focused on getting kids job-ready. Those who look at the program as a talent development or workforce development strategy – i.e. employers, industry associations, and the GWB – believe the focus is best

placed on technical skill attainment. Employers seem to be willing to do both types of work with a significantly heavier emphasis on technical skill development.

Social Mission Agenda

Within youth centers in particular that serve kids who are often victims of generational poverty, there is an intense commitment to finding appropriate experiences for them, which requires meeting youth where they are in terms of job readiness. Many of these youth need substantial training that focuses on the basics of employment: dress professionally, arrive on time, speak clearly and politely, follow through on tasks, work well with others. These are important skills that these youth in particular need the chance to develop before moving into a more substantial industry-based experience.

In addition, some of these youth need clarifying information about the intersection of work-based learning and funds received through the state assistance that sustains many of their families. Some have declined high-quality internships in the past like those offered through Electric Boat because they fear that the wages they earn will be counted as household income, and the family will consequently lose government assistance.

Perception Challenges among Teachers

A number of district-based administrators suggested that teachers' partial understanding of career readiness may impact attitudes and efforts towards school-based work-based learning. While teachers have some awareness of how the economy and career opportunities have changed over the last decade, they struggle to understand why schools should shift programmatically to align efforts more fully with the long-term, high-value career opportunities within the state, and they are unclear about how it affects their role. In addition, teachers do not have enough or the right kind of information to understand the importance of work-based learning.

Growing Employer Fatigue

Across the board, youth centers and school leaders voiced frustration with finding enough employers who are willing to provide high-quality work-based learning experiences. They have experienced a growing fatigue among employers who have been approached by multiple districts, schools, and non-profits for work-based learning placements and simply cannot accommodate them all.

Work-Based Learning Spectrum

The focus of conversations about work-based learning among employers, industry associations, district leaders, and non-profit administrators often seems to jump to internships and sometimes even apprenticeships without understanding and embracing the range of experiences that should happen for students in earlier formative years. Career exploration like assessing career interests, job shadowing, and career speakers have an important role to play in the spectrum of work-based learning, especially when they are introduced in elementary and middle grades.

Work-Based Learning Recommendations for Rhode Island

ESG offers the following recommendations for Rhode Island's consideration. To reach its goal of ensuring that all high school students have access to a quality work-based learning experience before graduation, Rhode Island must build new infrastructure, strengthen current programs, and incentivize employers, schools, students and their families to participate.

State Infrastructure Recommendations

In order to prepare every Rhode Island high school student for college and career and provide every student access to a high-quality work-based learning experience, Rhode Island must take advantage of its small size and build an underlying framework that supports and drives the work that key stakeholder groups - employers, districts, schools, local workforce boards, and non-profit organizations - each must undertake. New infrastructure must be built, and considerable changes are needed to existing infrastructure.

Establish a statewide intermediary for work-based learning.

To reach scale in a K-12 work-based learning program in a high-quality way, Rhode Island must create infrastructure that enables experiences for high school students to happen in an efficient, demand-driven, and consistent way across the state that meets employers' needs and is also aligned with the work of schools. This will require establishing an intermediary organization that is both employer-facing and school-facing that can solicit, coordinate, and scale work-based learning opportunities across sectors. Its primary responsibilities should include:

- Providing a compelling value proposition to employers of how well-planned and executed work-based learning experiences with high school students can play a meaningful role in their talent sourcing efforts;
- Brokering relationships with employers and industry associations to provide high-quality work-based learning experiences at scale for high school students, primarily in priority industries;
- Serving as the single point of contact for employers and industry associations for the full range of work-based learning opportunities, from career day in schools to job shadowing to internships and pre-apprenticeships;
- Communicating to employers and industry associations requirements of each type of work-based learning experience;
- Cataloging the various work-based learning experiences by program of study that employers and industry associations are willing and able to provide in a high-quality way;
- Working with coordinators in high schools – both comprehensive and CTE schools – to identify students who are ready for rigorous experiences;
- Matching employers and industry associations with ready students;

- Managing the logistics of work-based learning experiences that often act as barriers to employers and industry associations, from liability coverage to processing payroll;
- Incorporating employer feedback and responding to grievances from employers, should they arise; and
- Working with school coordinators to collect work-based learning assessment data that helps determine how work-based learning contributes to the state's credential attainment goal and prepares students for good jobs.

Procure services and tools to help the intermediary function efficiently and effectively

The roles and responsibilities assigned to this statewide intermediary are substantial. The more the state can offload logistical or process-oriented responsibilities, the more effectively and efficiently the intermediary will operate. Two services in particular warrant consideration:

- **Adecco** is a [staffing company](#) that specializes in workforce development strategies. In 2016, it embarked upon a goal of facilitating 10,000 work-based learning opportunities by 2020, and it has already begun working with Kentucky and Ohio to help scale their work-based learning programs. Of the services it provides, one in particular may be especially helpful to Rhode Island. Adecco takes on the role of Employer of Record for students ages 16 and older, which removes difficult barriers like payroll processing and liability insurance from employers and instead allows them to concentrate more fully on providing high-quality skills development experiences for students.
- **Launch Path**, designed by the Linked Learning Alliance, is an [online tool](#) that matches employers with students for work-based learning experiences. Taking the manual labor associated with hand matching students to internships off the shoulders of the intermediary and employers allows both to focus on strengthening the quality of the experiences themselves. This will be especially valuable to the many small companies in Rhode Island that lack the additional human capacity needed to provide such a function.

Streamline and target existing work-based learning programs administered by the GWB

Given the substantial shift the intermediary presents to how work-based learning is organized and facilitated in Rhode Island, existing programmatic infrastructure will need to change. While the current Work Immersion and Summer Youth Employment programs are well planned and thoughtfully organized, they are not set up to yield the intended result of preparing students for professional roles in the state's priority or opportunity industries. Both require significant change and reinvention.

Work Immersion Program

By statute, the Work Immersion program is primarily intended to serve college students and unemployed adults. To date, the program has served very few high school students, and those it has served are exclusively from CTE. Rhode Island would be better served retiring that program in its current form and redirecting those funds to the statewide intermediary for program administration as part of its larger effort toward ensuring high-quality work-based learning experiences statewide.

Summer Youth Employment Program

Likewise, the Summer Youth Employment program should undergo significant revision. While the primary focus of the program should be to prepare students for professional roles in priority industries, it should also in part continue to serve at-risk students who need job-readiness skills training before they can take part in an industry-aligned work-based learning experience that prepares them for the 21st century economy.

To accomplish this, the GWB should consider several courses of action. First, to ensure that a majority of the work-based learning experiences it sponsors will prepare school-aged youth for careers in priority industries, the GWB should redirect a substantial portion of the Summer Youth Employment program funds to support industry-aligned experiences for high school students managed through the statewide intermediary. This will embed work-based learning experiences more effectively into schools and be a strong step towards transitioning to a year-round work-based learning program. The remaining funds should continue to support experiences for at-risk students from youth centers, the goal of which should be to strengthen their employability skills while increasing their awareness of a wide range of industries and occupations available within the state's economy. Finally, because that revised summer program will be substantially smaller than in previous years, the GWB should consider bidding the work directly to youth centers, which will remove unnecessarily laborious channels from the award process and enable the local workforce boards to instead serve in a more focused role of program administration.

State Programmatic Recommendations

As the state takes action on the infrastructure recommendations described above, it must simultaneously begin working on programmatic improvements too. The following recommendations are aimed at helping Rhode Island put the necessary conditions in place to help all students participate in a high-quality work-based learning experience before high school graduation.

Launch a statewide vision for work-based learning

Rhode Island has embarked upon strong career pathways development work intended to prepare students for roles in priority and opportunity industries. Those efforts focus on providing a broad range of experiences to all students to prepare them for economic and career success, including high-quality work-based learning experiences that connect classroom learning with the world of work.

The state should leverage this early work as a springboard to launching a robust vision that drives and prioritizes work-based learning in all high schools and clearly communicates intended outcomes. Messaging should be disseminated in a strategic and coordinated way to all key internal and external stakeholder groups to raise their awareness of the priority, explain how it will support and drive other priority goals, and build their commitment to it.

To help this vision take root and flourish, messaging alone will not be enough. Key leaders, including the Governor, will need to elevate this priority and use the bully pulpit to recruit more employers to provide high-quality experiences. Professional development will need to be provided to district and school-based administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors, and information should be systematically shared with students and parents to help them understand the important role work-based learning can play in preparing students for success after high school.

Develop a clear definition of work-based learning and associated quality indicators

To move this vision and robust agenda forward at scale, RIDE and GWB must work together to define what is meant by high-quality work-based learning and develop criteria to support that definition. A full range of work-based learning experiences should be articulated as part of that work, beginning with early awareness activities in elementary school and career exploration activities in middle school, and moving into training and preparation efforts in high school. The latter category will likely include internships and pre-apprenticeships, which should each be defined carefully by taking into consideration some important questions, such as:

- Will experiences be required to develop academic knowledge as well as technical and professional skills? Must they be connected with a student's academic program of study?
- Will experiences have to take place at an employer worksite? Will they have to be paid? How many hours will, at a minimum, constitute a quality experience?
- Will experiences be integrally tied to participation and completion of a program of study, or will students be allowed to participate in them as standalone opportunities?
- Must experiences be assessed by employers to verify skill development? To what extent?
- Will experiences count for high school course credit?

Provide design support to employers

Once clear expectations and intended outcomes of quality work-based learning have been defined and agreed to by key state leaders, Rhode Island should disseminate them to business and industry partners through established channels and through the statewide intermediary to ensure that potential providers are aware of the level of quality expected in work-based learning experiences. The state may also need to develop and offer technical assistance to employers who are interested in providing internships and other forms of work-based learning but may need help in designing new experiences and/or upgrading existing experiences to meet and exceed the quality indicators.

Build a career immersion course, inclusive of work-based learning, into each program of study

The flip side of preparing employers to provide high-quality experiences is to ensure that students are ready to be successful in those experiences. Prior preparation, in terms of both academic and professional readiness, will go a long way towards demonstrating the seriousness with which schools and districts take work-based learning to help employers overcome their reluctance to working with high school students, and it will increase the likelihood that they will be long-term investors in the program.

Rhode Island should design and build a career immersion course within each CTE program of study, much like other states have done, that develops students' readiness for the workplace and for professional roles more generally. The front end of this course (approximately 15% of the total course) might include professional goal setting, professional skill development, mock interview and job screening processes, financial literacy, and development of a professional portfolio that illustrates the skill set students have developed through their program of study. The remainder of this course would be a work-based learning experience aligned to a student's program of study that focuses heavily on technical skill attainment. By including this as an actual course, it will not only provide instruction dedicated to developing students' workplace readiness, but it will also allow students to receive course credit for completing it.

State Incentive Recommendations

While building program quality must be Rhode Island's top priority, the state must also find ways to incentivize districts, schools, and employers to participate. The development of the statewide intermediary will significantly help motivate employers to provide work-based learning. Likewise, the state should take advantage of various ways in which it can compel changes in districts' and schools' priorities and practices. Work-based learning at scale cannot happen unless and until these levers are pulled.

Incentivize high-quality work-based learning through funding and program approval processes

One of the most powerful and palatable levers at the state's disposal is the CTE program of study approval process. From the perspective of incentivizing high-quality work-based learning, this lever is currently underutilized. The state can revise its approval process to add more stringent requirements about the inclusion of work-based learning that meets the state's quality indicators. Those programs of study that do not offer work-based learning experiences should not be approved, including legacy programs that seek to be renewed that instead will need to be retired.

In addition, Rhode Island might investigate the opportunity it has within its funding formula to weight certain courses more than others. The state might make the career immersion course described earlier eligible for higher funding than introductory-level courses within programs of study so that districts and schools are more likely to make that career immersion course available to students. The helpful byproduct of this strategy might be that because that course would come later in the prescribed program of study course sequence, completion of that course would not only increase the number of students participating in work-based learning but also the number of students who complete that program of study and earn an associated credential with labor market value.

Incentivize work-based learning through accountability

Leveraging funding and program approval processes more optimally will substantially strengthen work-based learning participation, but that will primarily impact CTE students. To compel all schools to offer work-based learning at greater scale, Rhode Island should consider incorporating it within its informal and formal accountability efforts.

Rhode Island should commit to publicly reporting by school the number of students who participate in work-based learning that meets the state's quality indicators. Data collection necessary for this reporting will be helped significantly through the information gathered by the statewide intermediary as well as by data that can be acquired by course code for the new career immersion course offered through each program of study.

In addition, Rhode Island should examine the extent to which work-based learning can be brought into the Pathways Endorsement that was recently approved as part of the state's ESSA plan. According to the plan, the Pathway Endorsement certifies that a student has accomplished deep learning in a chosen area of study and is prepared for employment or further education in a career path. Because the endorsement requires student application of skills, there is a natural opportunity to incorporate work-based learning in as a means by which students demonstrate that skill attainment. Rhode Island's intent to calculate and report Pathway Endorsement attainment for all students as well as for each major subgroup of students for all schools will incentivize schools and districts to prioritize work-based learning.

Allow work-based learning to happen on a flexible schedule

A final incentive that will help employers and non-profits alike is allowing work-based learning experiences to happen within and beyond a traditional school schedule. Schools operate by class periods; business and industry and non-profit organizations do not. Guidance for work-based learning must allow experiences to happen not only within the school day, but also in the evenings, on weekends, and over the summer. This will help facilitate the scale of work-based learning that Rhode Island seeks for all of its high school students.